The Daily Tar Heel

NEWS

Roman Candle's Local Pop Shines; Wu-Tang Claims Hip-Hop Crown

By Staff Editor
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Roman Candle

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Four Stars 1/2

Many of us have long suspected a truth about music - the agents, the press releases and even the big-name label don't guarantee that it's going to be good. In fact, it seems that the best music out there starts out as the most overlooked.

It's no surprise, therefore, that after a semester thumbing through glossy publicity photos and shiny CD wrappers, the best album I've reviewed is this one: a demo someone happened to hand me.

Roman Candle's self-titled debut proves that no amount of business maneuvering will ever replace the fundamentals of good music: real talent, a knack for songwriting and sincerity. This is a refreshing return to these fundamentals.

The band is composed of two brothers, Skip and Logan Matheny, both of of UNC. This in itself lends them a certain fraternal wholesomeness, along with that local, college-kid charm (not unlike Cambridge, Mass.'s pop darlings The Push Kings).

More important than charm, though, the Mathenys know how to make music - Roman Candle is like a jollier Jeff Buckley mixed with some Rufus Wainwright. Add a bigger

splash of guitar and drums along with an oddly British strain, like a bit of western North Carolina mixed with a dash of Radiohead.

The final ingredient is a lyrical awareness of everyday life, from paper cups to ceiling fans, that is uniquely Roman Candle. It proves to be an addictive mix.

Take "You Don't Belong to This World," an absolutely brilliant pop melody. It's destined to be a single, so bright and catchy that you can't stop singing it, and yet you don't feel guilty.

Proving their versatility, "Merciful Man" is a little more mellow, and like another track, "Sookie," it's reminiscent of Elliott Smith (certainly it's not coincidence that the one of Smith's albums is titled Roman Candle).

The entire CD is like this, each song showing a different facet of the band. In fact, part of Roman Candle's charm is how each song stands independently.

One gets the feeling that they have put a lot of time crafting their music, whether it's the drum intro or bass line. Even when they're rockin', Roman Candle's attention to good song lyrics and vocalist Skip's sweet, honest delivery falls into the singer-songwriter tradition (a tradition too often missing from most hollow popular music).

In short, Roman Candle is good, surprisingly good - just the sort of clean, unaffected kind of music you forgot still existed. Check them out now, because they've got the potential to go places.

By Joanna Pearson

Wu-Tang Clan

The W

Four Stars

In the fly-by-night world of hip hop, artists on top of their game rarely manage to hold on to their spot for much longer than a Redskins place kicker. As in football, it's also true of hip hop that the more attempts you take, the greater the chance that you'll fuck up and fall off.